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Security Council

Fifty-seventh year

Provisional

4488th meeting

Tuesday, 12 March 2002, 10.30 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Kolby	(Norway)
Members:	Bulgaria	Mr. Tafrov
	Cameroon	Mr. Mbayu
	China	Mr. Wang Yingfan
	Colombia	Mr. Salazar
	France	Mr. Levitte
	Guinea	Mr. Boubacar Diallo
	Ireland	Mr. Ryan
	Mauritius	Mr. Koonjul
	Mexico	Mr. Aguilar Zínser
	Russian Federation	Mr. Lavrov
	Singapore	Mr. Mahbubani
	Syrian Arab Republic	Mr. Wehbe
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Jeremy Greenstock
	United States of America	Mr. Negroponte

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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02-28233 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Israel, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Lancry (Israel) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: I should also like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 12 March 2002 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2002/256 and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council to be held today, Tuesday, 12 March 2002, regarding the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the rules of procedure and with previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

I welcome the presence of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and I give him the floor.

The Secretary-General: Three weeks ago, I briefed the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East. I warned then that we were nearing the abyss. Since that day, the toll of the dead and wounded, particularly among innocent civilians, has risen to levels that can be described, without exaggeration, as appalling.

Israeli-Palestinian tensions are at boiling point. The situation is the worst in 10 years. Escalation has been met with escalation with little and, in some cases, no regard for innocent civilian lives. Acts that are disproportionate in scale and indiscriminate in their effect are occurring on an almost daily basis.

The scale of the carnage is horrifying. Since the beginning of the current crisis in September 2000, there have been some 1,200 fatalities among the Palestinians. More than 180 of them have occurred in the last 10 days. On the Israeli side, out of some 350 fatalities, well over 50 have occurred in the same 10 days. I grieve, as we all must, for the families of those who have lost their lives or have been maimed or wounded. I grieve for Israel and Palestine.

In giving the Council my assessment of the situation on the ground, I would like to start by saying that I am profoundly disturbed by the increasing use of heavy weaponry by Israel in civilian areas. It has made life even more difficult and precarious for Palestinian civilians, who were already subjected to severe physical and economic hardships.

Large-scale military operations in pursuit of Palestinian militants — involving ground troops, attack helicopters, tanks and F-16s — have taken place throughout civilian areas and refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza, causing large-scale loss of life. In addition, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other agencies are reporting growing disregard on the part of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) for the safety of medical and ambulance personnel who are attempting to treat and evacuate wounded from conflict zones. Only last week, a United Nations staff member was killed in a clearly marked ambulance of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

On the other side, the Palestinians have played their full part in the escalating cycle of violence, counter-violence and revenge. Palestinian groups have carried out a series of attacks on Israeli military and civilian targets. They have attacked IDF checkpoints

and settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. Kassam II rockets have been launched against civilian areas in Israeli towns. I am particularly disturbed by suicide attacks which deliberately target civilians, spreading fear and anxiety throughout the general population.

Against this backdrop, I very much welcome the decision of the United States to send General Zinni back to the region. Both Chairman Arafat and Prime Minister Sharon have taken steps to facilitate his efforts. Mr. Arafat has finally arrested all those suspected of involvement in the assassination of Rehavam Zeevi, the Israeli Tourism Minister. Mr. Sharon has wisely given up his demand for seven days of calm before beginning negotiations.

I hope both leaders will engage constructively with General Zinni in a renewed and intensified dialogue on the political, security and economic dimensions of the peace process. The alternative for both sides is continued bloodshed, delaying even further the prospects for an end to the occupation and the violence.

At this time, I feel I must speak directly to the people and leaders of both sides.

To the Palestinians I say: you have the inalienable right to a viable State within secure, internationally recognized borders, but you must stop all acts of terror and all suicide bombings. The deliberate and indiscriminate targeting of civilians is morally repugnant. It is doing immense harm to your cause by weakening international support and making Israelis believe that it is their existence as a State, and not the occupation, that is being opposed.

To the Israelis I say: you have the right to live in peace and security within secure, internationally recognized borders, but you must end the illegal occupation. More urgently, you must stop the bombing of civilian areas, the assassinations, the unnecessary use of lethal force, the demolitions and the daily humiliation of ordinary Palestinians. Such actions gravely erode Israel's standing in the international community and further fuel the fires of hatred, despair and extremism among Palestinians.

To the leaders on both sides — Prime Minister Sharon and Chairman Arafat in particular — I say: you can still lead your peoples away from disaster. You have accepted the Tenet understandings and the Mitchell recommendations as the basis for negotiations. Today, more than ever, you must recognize that security and a political settlement are indivisible. One cannot exist without the other. Many of your friends stand ready to support you if you seize this opportunity.

In closing, let me say that the recent initiative by Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia sets out a clear and compelling vision for peace in the Middle East based on the bedrock of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). I appeal to the leaders of the Arab world not to give up on the search for peace, but rather to unite in support of this vision, showing the world and the parties that there is an alternative to war.

I call on Mr. Arafat and Mr. Sharon immediately to take the necessary political, security and economic steps on the ground that can help realize this vision. Finally, I call on the Security Council to lend its full authority and influence to the vital cause of peace.

The President: There is no other speaker for this meeting.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.